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FACTS ON FOOD WASTE

Preliminary Findings, June 1, 1943
Nutrition and Food Conservation Branch
War Food Administration
Washington, D. C.

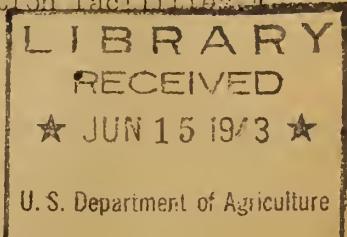
U.S. Food Administration

1. "A Survey of Family Spending and Saving in Wartime", made by the Bureau of Home Economics in the Spring of 1942 indicated a per capita consumption of 1,460 lbs. of food per year, that is almost an even 4.0 lbs. per day.

A study of garbage collection in 48 representative cities, made by the American Public Works Association in 1939 indicated an average of 235 lbs. per person per year, or .65 lbs. per day. Another study made by Walter H. Stolting, Bureau of Agricultural Economics and published in 1941 which covered 247 cities, indicated garbage collection even higher (an average of 302 lbs. per person per year, or .83 lbs. per day.)

Garbage collections therefore, appear to represent 15 to 20% of the total food consumed. Not all food wasted in the home is collected as garbage of course. Since, however, a portion of the garbage is inedible waste such as egg shells, melon rinds, corn cobs, etc., food waste in the home may be conservatively estimated at the lower figure of 15% of food prepared for consumption.

2. Food wastage appears to be highest in perishables such as fruits and vegetables, and in baked goods. According to an analysis of 160 loads of garbage made by the Engineering Research Laboratory of New York University, published in 1941, 23% of the garbage consisted of green vegetables, 27% other vegetables, 29% fruits, 14% baked goods. The remaining 7% was meats, bones, and fish.
3. Precise data on food waste in restaurants and public eating places is not available, but the Restaurant Division of the Food Distribution Administration estimates that food waste of the type which is under the control of management runs from 3 to 8%. In addition, it is estimated that there is a wastage of 6% or more in food left unconsumed on the table by restaurant patrons. The total food waste in restaurants and public eating places according to this estimate would run between 9 and 14%.
4. A study of food waste in retail stores indicates that in fresh fruits and vegetables the average is between 6 and 8%. For many of the more perishable fruits and vegetables, the loss is considerably higher. The Journal of Commerce estimated in 1931 that "more than \$470,000,000 worth of perishable food is wasted each year in retail stores alone through lack of proper refrigeration facilities."



A great deal of wastage also occurs through excessive handling of foods by customers.

5. Some idea of the losses of food in transportation can be gained from the following report by the Association of American Railways:

In 1941 American Class I steam railways paid \$8,346,152 in damage claims for food spoiled in transit. For the first six months of the fiscal year ending June 30, 1942, they paid \$5,295,488. Analysis of damage claims on 21,155 carloads of lettuce, shipped to 30 eastern cities in 1935, revealed an average claim of .37.44 per carload. It is also worth noting that the damage claims paid do not represent total losses.

6. It is common knowledge that there is considerable food wastage on the farm, consisting of food which for various reasons is never harvested. Although no segregated estimate of this loss on the farm is available, a study made by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics indicates that the food waste between the time of production and the time the food leaves the retail store is as high as 30% for tomatoes, lettuce, cauliflower; 25% for cabbage, spinach, celery; 20% for fruits like apples, pears, peaches; 13% for oranges, and grapefruit. For less perishable commodities such as potatoes, peas, beets, the wastage is relatively low (5 to 8%).

7. Adding the waste from farm to retail store to the waste in the home, it appears that total food waste may run between 30 and 40%. Considering the amount of inedible matter represented by egg shells, melon rinds, corn cobs, etc., the lower figure of 30% would probably represent a conservative estimate on total edible food wasted in this country.

What do these figures mean in simple terms?

- (1) In 1942, less than 14% of our total food production was set aside for army and lend-lease requirements. In our homes alone we apparently wasted this much food.
- (2) The utmost increase in food production hoped for in 1943 as represented by the goals set for agriculture is 5%. It is therefore obvious that our biggest reserve of food is in the 30% which for one reason or another is lost between the farm and the garbage pail.
- (3) According to the American Baker's Association, we are now eating approximately 2 lbs. of bread per week per person. If each home wastes only 1 slice of bread per week, the total would amount to 32 million slices, or approximately 2 million

loaves each week. What would the hungry kids of Athens or Chungking give for those 2 million loaves!

(4) Nutritionists and medical authorities tell us that the American diet is weakest in green vegetables and fruits. How is it we allow so much of these valuable foods to go to waste on our farms and in our stores? How is it one quarter of the food in our garbage dumps consists of green vegetables? (Perhaps we need to learn to prepare and cook greens as well as we do meats and desserts.)

(5) The little scraps of butter we leave on our plates in homes and restaurants add up to an enormous aggregate. If only 1/2 ounce of butter per capita every week were saved, it would provide enough butter to have supplied the needs of our entire armed forces last year.

(6) How much needless food waste is caused by our rules of etiquette? Can we afford, in wartime, to refuse to let Johnny pick up the bone in his fingers and gnaw off the last shreds of meat? Is it really good etiquette not to tip your soup bowl to get the last two or three spoonfuls? With a shortage of fats, what's wrong with using bread to sop up the gravy on the plate? Can we afford to prepare and serve more food than the guests will eat just to keep up the reputation of "the bountiful hostess"?

(7) "Spare the peel and save the spud." When you peel and boil a potato you throw away 1/10 to 1/4 of its bulk, a large part of its Vitamin C, and a large amount of its iron, which is concentrated close to the skin.

(8) Squeeze your grapefruit dry! Just one cup of grapefruit juice provides approximately a full day's requirement of Vitamin C. When you fail to squeeze out the juice after eating the pulp as much as a quarter of the value you paid for may be wasted.

JUN 15 1963

